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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Statement of the co-chairs of the Sri Lanka Donor Group

1. (U) Summary: Sri Lankan media provided prominent, widespread and positive coverage to the statement issued June 13 by the Tokyo donors' conference co-chairs following their Washington meeting. Electronic media reported the statement on Tuesday, June 14, while all print media carried front-page reports on Wednesday morning, June 15. Government owned and mainstream independent media emphasized the co-chairs' hope for the quick establishment of a joint mechanism for tsunami relief and reconstruction, while Sinhala nationalist papers emphasized the donors' call for the LTTE to end assassinations and recruitment of child soldiers. All print media published the statement in full. End summary.

2. (U) All English and vernacular print press ran front-page banner headlines of the co-chairs statement on Wednesday, June 15. Government owned Daily News headlined, "Donors support President, LTTE effort to implement P-TOMS (Post-Tsunami Organizational Management Structure)" with a smaller

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subtitle, "LTTE told to stop assassinations." Mainstream independent Daily Mirror bannered, "Sign P-TOMS deal now: co-chairs." Pro-JVP (junior alliance partner Janatha Vimukthi Urumaya) Island bannered, "Tiger atrocities worry donors."

3. (U) In a page three story, the pro-JVP Island published a story titled, "Why don't donors try to liberate people behind the iron curtain - Sangaree," in which anti-LTTE TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) leader V. Anandasangaree condemned the Co-chair's support of the Joint Mechanism proposal, alleging Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas are enslaved by the Tigers. The article quoted Public Affairs Officer saying that despite the co-chairs' encouragement of the Joint Mechanism agreement, the U.S. had not changed its designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization.

4. (U) The Tamil and Sinhala language press also afforded the statement broad coverage, often mirroring the stories of their English-language counterparts. Government owned papers reported the statement with the most prominence. Government owned Sinhala Dinamina led with, "Sri Lanka's Donor co-chairs pledge total support to the Tsunami Relief Council; stress need for Muslim representation too," while government owned Tamil daily Thinakaran bannered, "co-chairs of the donors fully support the JM - urge government to include Muslim representation and sign immediately." Independent Tamil papers also emphasized the timely signing of the accord; independent Tamil daily Thinakkural led with, "Sign the JM immediately - co-chairs," and independent Tamil daily Virakesari ran, "President should review her decision at least at the last moment - JVP: JM should be established immediately - Donors urge the government."

5. (U) Television and radio broadcasts on the co-chairs meeting reported it in a relatively straightforward manner from the press release. Television news programs emphasized the co-chairs' "demand" for the immediate establishment of the Joint Mechanism.

6. (SBU) Comment: Government owned media, which generally act as the President's mouthpiece, used the co-chair's statement to rally support in their on-going public relations campaign for the Joint Mechanism. Predictably, the Sinhala nationalist press emphasized the criticism of the LTTE. We expect more commentary to emerge on the statement over the next several days and will report accordingly. End Comment.

Entwistle